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Reagan, aides shape arms policy

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WASHINGTON - President Ronald Reagan and a handful of top policy makers will huddle at the White House in an unannounced meeting this morning to shape a new arms control strategy for dealing with the Soviet Union.

Well-placed Administration sources say the basic choice is whether Reagan will only hint at new arms control positions in talks two weeks hence with Foreign Minister Andrei Gromyko - requiring the Russians to return to negotiations to learn specifics - or unveil some key details as an inducement to return.

Today's policy session, to be restricted to the Secretaries of State and Defense, the heads of the Central Intelligence Agency and the Arms Control and Disarmament Agency, and the chairman of the Joint Chiefs, also will decide what tone the President ought to strike in a major foreign policy address before the United Nations.

At the same time, a senior State Department official said the Administration will probably delay making public an unclassified version of a study by a presidential advisory panel alleging 17 instances of Soviet cheating on various arms control agreements until after Reagan meets with Gromyko on Sept. 28 so as not to unduly chill the atmosphere surrounding those talks. A number of congressional conservatives have been trying to force release of the report this week or next.

Reagan to address UN

Reagan is to address the opening session of the UN General Assembly on Sept. 24, with Gromyko expected to speak the following day. On Sept. 26, Shultz and Gromyko will meet in New York, and on Sept. 28, Gromyko will confer with the President in Washington.

Officials say the UN address and the subsequent meetings with Gromyko are viewed as important both in terms of the President's campaign for re-election and for the effort to create a better atmosphere in which talks over strategic weapons might be resumed in a second term.

Sources say a number of competing options have been laid before the President by vying elements within the Administration. They are said to include something along the following lines:

- If the Soviets will agree to resume talks, the United States will offer a three-year moratorium on testing

antisatellite weapons; discuss restrictions on defensive weapons in space and modify its Strategic Arms Reduction Talks position to include a ceiling of 1800 strategic missiles and bombers and 9000 ballistic and cruise missile warheads, with sub-ceilings on heavy missiles, multiple warhead missiles and missile payload.

- Offer a five-year START agreement in which both sides would cut back to about 8000 missile warheads and the United States would halve its force of strategic bombers carrying cruise missiles to 200 if the Russians would halve the number of their very large SS18 missiles to 150. During the treaty period, the United States would discuss the possibility of restrictions or bans on some types of antimissile space weapons and antisatellite weapons and would consider a temporary ban on antisatellite testing.

- The United States would stress that both sides have much to gain from restrictions on and reductions in both offensive and defensive weapons and stress the United States is willing to be flexible once negotiations resume but feels no compunction to offer new concessions in order to get talks underway.

Sources say a number of options had been prepared over the summer as the Administration prepared for expected talks with the Russians on Sept. 18 in Vienna. The Soviets, on June 29, had proposed antisatellite and antispace weapons talks on that date and the United States had accepted, but each side advanced provisos which the other took to be unacceptable pre-conditions.

With the collapse of the Vienna forum, the Administration looks to the talks with Gromyko, who is thought to be increasingly powerful within the Politburo, as an alternative way of sounding out the Soviets on whether and under what circumstances they are prepared to get back into serious arms control bargaining.

Some senior officials feel the power struggle for succession of ailing President Konstantin Chernenko makes it very difficult right now for the Russians to take the sort of hard policy decisions to abandon their tactic of refusing negotiations while American medium-range missiles continue to be deployed in Western Europe.

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Two views on talks' timing

These officials caution that it would be counter-productive to make new concessions now because they would simply be pocketed by the Soviets against the time in the indefinite future when serious talks resume. "When they're ready to engage us in negotiations, they'll engage us," said one analyst, "and not before."

Other officials, however, feel that if the United States outlines specific thinking on where fair compromises might be struck, this might induce the Soviets to return to the bargaining table, otherwise facing the prospect of an unrestrained buildup over the next four years if, as the Russians apparently think likely, Reagan is re-elected.

Sources say the President is angry at the attempt of conservative members of Congress to force publication at this time of an unclassified version of a cheating study completed late last year by the General Advisory Committee on Arms Control, an outside group of advisers. Riders were placed on the Defense appropriations bill by both houses requiring that a "sanitized" version of the top secret study be released by Sept. 15.